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SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT ON WORK ON BENCHMARKS AND INDICATORS

Note by the Secretariat

PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

1. In response to decision 10/9 of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for Desertification (INCD), taken at its tenth session, the Secretariat continued the informal open-ended consultative process on benchmarks and indicators established in accordance with decision 9/12. In accordance with decision 10/9, the process includes representatives from the Asian and Latin American and Caribbean regions, as well as other regions. In continuing the process, the INCD requested the interim Secretariat to put particular emphasis in its work on benchmarks and indicators on:

a) the further elaboration of implementation indicators; and

b) the development of a methodology for determining impact indicators.

2. A number of the participants in the process attended an informal consultative meeting at the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa, Canada from 15-17 July 1997. As anticipated in paragraph 6 of document ICCD/COP(1)/CST/3, a report on the conclusions of the Ottawa meeting follows.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE INFORMAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING

I. Implementation indicators

3. The group reviewed the report contained in A/AC.241/Inf.4 and the following additional comments were made on the work reflected in that document:

a) the existence of a national Environmental Action Plan for Sustainable Development should be added as an indicator as Annex 1.A.5;

b) the evaluation parameters and remarks contained in Annex 1.B (NAP formulation) should be applied as well to the formulation of subregional and regional action plans, mutatis mutandis;

c) data used in developing and applying implementation indicators under section 4 of the document should be gender-disaggregated;

d) under Annex 1.A.2 (Effective programmes implemented in compliance with priority fields), reference to government policies on gender would also be appropriate as an evaluation parameter. The number of women involved in the process could also be specified as an evaluation parameter under Annex 1.C.3 (Effectiveness of measures in local capacity building).

II. Elements for a Method to Determine Impact Indicators

A. Introduction

4. The following report represents the conclusions of the informal consultative meeting on elements for a method to determine impact indicators. The report focuses on impact indicators because they are necessary to assess the effects of actions to implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD).

5. Although a great of deal of work has been done on indicators, it is necessary to have a method of developing and testing impact indicators that meet the specific requirements of the CCD.

6. Indicators of impact will help the actors at the different levels to assess their own progress, review their priorities and improve their positions with respect to combatting desertification, mitigating the effects of drought and improving the lives of people in affected areas.

7. The informal group has produced elements of a method to determine impact indicators. These elements will need to be elaborated into a complete method, for adoption and testing by the parties at national, sub-national and local levels.

8. Noting the task to carry forward consultation on the development of benchmarks and indicators for assessing the implementation and impact of the CCD, the group recognizes two distinct uses of the term, "benchmark":

a) a representative site where detailed studies are conducted and results are extrapolated to a larger area that is represented by that site.

b) a set of data called a baseline that serves as the starting point for evaluating subsequent trends in an indicator or issue.

Hereafter, the specific terms "representative site" and "baseline" will be used rather the more general and confusing term, "benchmark".

9. In considering the development of a method, the group recalled the principles and the provisions of articles 4, 2a, 8(1) and 10 of the CCD.

B. Inventory and Evaluation

10. The group recommended that each party to the CCD undertake a comprehensive inventory and evaluation of the biophysical and socio-economic conditions of the affected areas and of capacities in their countries.

C. Steps in the Method

11. The group proposes that the method consist of the following steps:

a) Define the Objectives

i) The global objectives (article 2, paragraph 1) are to:

- combat desertification
- mitigate the effects of drought
- contribute to achievement of sustainable development

ii) The contributing objectives (article 2, paragraph 2) are to:

- improve land productivity
- rehabilitate, improve and manage sustainably land and water resources
- improve living conditions at the community level

iii) The specific objectives will be defined by the action programs.

b) Define the Spatial Levels and the Actors at Each Level

i) The actors involved in developing and using indicators will be different at each spatial level. For example:

. Global	Appropriate international bodies
. Regional	Appropriate international and regional bodies
. Sub-Regional	Appropriate international, regional and sub-regional bodies
. National	National Coordination Units (NCUs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) with links to relevant institutions
. Sub-National	Responsible Sub-Nationals, e.g. state, provincial, district, departmental; NGOs with strong functional links and assistance to NCU's
. Local	Communities, farmers, women, with support of extension agents, researchers, etc. with Sub-Nationals and NGO assistance

ii) Research organizations are necessary to provide support at all levels.

c) Identify Key Issues

12. A great many issues are referred to in the text of the Convention. It is likely that the actors at each level will wish to focus on a few key issues that need to be identified and prioritized together with the expected results.

d) Design Indicators and Collect Data

13. The design of indicators and collection of data is an iterative process. It is necessary to select indicators for which data are already available or can be obtained at reasonable costs. At the same time, it is important to know what indicators would best portray the key issues and expected results that have been identified.

14. The people who should design the indicators and collect the data are the actors at the spatial level concerned, assisted by organizations at other levels as required. Global and regional indicator sets should ensure comparability across regions.

i) Selection and analysis of indicators

- Select a minimum set of indicators. Ideally one indicator per issue and expected result.
- Define each indicator preferably using consistent terminology.
- Identify the required data and the means and methods of collecting them. It is of course necessary to analyze the availability, collectability and cost effectiveness of the data.
- If a given indicator is not available, select a suitable proxy.

. Evaluate each indicator for:
  - how well it represents the issue and expected result
  - how well it covers the spatial level
  - how reliable it is methodologically

  Evaluation should include feedback from the users.
. Periodically review indicators and add, delete and modify as needed.

ii) Collection of Data

. Determine when data should be collected and reported.
. Adopt policy for:
  - prioritizing core data sets
  - mechanisms for funding data sets
  - data exchange
  - documentation (precision and accuracy)
  - accessibility
. Collect baseline data on socio-economic and bio-physical conditions of affected areas.
. Collect gender specific data where relevant.

e) Measure and Map Indicators

For each indicator:

i) collect and analyze data
ii) establish a baseline
iii) define performance criteria
iv) present results

f) Combine Indicators

15. It is necessary to combine or aggregate the indicators to provide decision-makers (at any level) with a few clear messages. Aggregation is done in steps:

- indicators to issues
- issues to sets of issues
- sets of issues to overall objectives

D. Operational Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

16. Principal guidelines required to achieve an operational monitoring and evaluation systems include:

i) a permanent network of representative sites based on agro-ecological homogeneity
ii) an environmental information system based on some database management procedures
iii) exchange of information agreements on partnerships and scientific cooperation

17. The steps necessary to implement an operational monitoring and evaluation system include:

i) specifying the needs for the users and decision-makers
ii) undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of existing situation including availability of information
iii) conducting multi-disciplinary studies and collecting minimum data sets at the representative sites to facilitate comparison across agro-ecological zones
iv) collecting the appropriate minimum data sets
v) defining an appropriate time interval for monitoring and evaluation in accordance with user needs and levels
vi) strengthening national capacities for monitoring and evaluation

E. Information Systems

18. In order to ensure a systematic feedback to the users and decision makers, steps for establishing an effective information system should include:

i) determining information needs of users and decision makers
ii) establishing baseline data sets for assessing trends (i.e. start with all the information that is available)
iii) reviewing linkages with other users of the national system and synergies with other conventions
iv) providing for networking:
- horizontally among sectors that are using and providing data
- vertically among spatial levels
v) linking local knowledge and data centres emphasizing and utilizing grassroots indicators
vi) making agreements on information exchange, partnerships and scientific cooperation
vii) capacity building and external assistance through:
- assessment of needs
- providing training, facilities, methods, materials and finance
viii) preparing information products on environment, people and desertification
ix) assessing costs and benefits
x) ensuring effective dissemination and access

F. Application at the Local Level

19. Recognizing the complexity of the problem, the group offers guidance on how the method could be applied at the local level:

i) seeking feedback from farmers/land users (mostly women) including through interviews and questionnaires
ii) holding village meetings
iii) training teams of facilitators to help villagers to conduct their own assessments of their well-being and the condition of the land
iv) ensuring that these assessments are part of local action programs
v) providing local assessments and action programs to influence higher level (e.g. national) assessments and action programs
vi) developing new research frameworks to accommodate farmer level information (including traditional knowledge) as well as scientific information